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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance and the place of collections preservation management in the larger preservation objectives of a library or an archive. Topics addressed include the issues, restraints, strategies, and difficulties associated with implementing collections preservation. The first section frames some of the management issues associated with collections preservation in the United States, including hybrid treatment approaches and integration with other library functions and units. The second section considers assessment, including condition surveys and the use of online catalogs and databases to provide critical information in terms of action surveys. The third section describes selection strategies, including the use-based/circulation-based approach, the subject/great collections/class approach, and the acquisitions-based approach. The fourth section discusses prioritizing, and the last section presents the framework for collections preservation activities at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana). (MES)

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Collection Preservation Management: An Approach to Complement Item-by-Item Treatment Policies

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Abstract

Collections preservation management is a critical part of preservation management and a topic which is of current concern. On April 19-21, 1999, the European Conference organized by the National Library of the Netherlands, IFLA-PAC, and the European Commission on Preservation and Access, held a conference at the Hague on "Preservation Management: Between Policy and Practice." The conference addressed the need for European libraries and archives to begin to define comprehensive preservation programs and policies that would cover the full range of services and treatments that were the proper domain of preservation. The conference noted that "many archives and libraries reached some form of agreement has been reached about preservation requirements in general and abstract terms... the transition from theory to practice is often fraught with difficulties and relatively few institutions in Europe have experience with the realization of concrete projects."

Paper

Our purpose today is to speak somewhat theoretically about the importance and the place of collections preservation management in the larger preservation objectives of a library or an archive.

Today's speakers will address some of the issues, restraints, strategies, and difficulties associated with implementing collections preservation in their respective institutions and/or countries. We hope this program will answer some of your own questions and stimulate further ideas as you begin to think about collections preservation.

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Collections Preservation Management

The United States has been very successful in articulating and designing collections preservation programs, especially in its academic libraries. As an introduction to today's program, I thought it might be helpful to frame some of the management issues, we in the United States, associate with collections preservation.

While it is true that preservation and conservation had its origins in the individual treatment of special and rare materials, the majority of our library holdings are in the general circulating collection. Shear size and diversity of materials in the general collection, present preservation managers with an array of issues and values that must be brought together into a meaningful plan of action, e.g., different formats, use patterns, retention criteria, collection value, etc. Neither item-by-item selection strategies nor treatment options is capable of providing the sort of information needed to manage a collections preservation program. A different set of management information is needed.

As a result, preservation programs have had to offer a greater repertoire, indeed, hybrid treatment approaches, such as improved micro-climatic housing, systematic programs of better housekeeping practices, environmental controls, improved care and handling practices, early binding, mass deacidification, and reformatting.

Similarly, preservation management has become more integrated with other library functions and units such as, collection development, cataloging, circulation, etc., where important information is gathered and/or a variety of preservation options can be integrated into already existing workflows.

A collection preservation management program is aimed at attaining a larger understanding of the nature of risk to groups of materials, providing assessment, establishing selection criteria and strategies, prioritizing collections, and implementing large scale preventative and remedial treatments. This also requires that preservation managers understand that many collections preservation activities at times be take on a phased approach with hybrid strategies and hybrid treatments.

What drives the mechanism for collections preservation management then is a careful analysis of the collections, understanding the realities of the preservation operation one has, and using management information to determine collection value and utility.

Because most preservation initiatives in the United States have evolved out of and reside in academic libraries and not a national library, much of the literature on collection preservation management is framed around a preservation program's necessity to support the mission and priorities of its academic institution. This context has obviously shaped the architecture of our thinking and planning. It also explains the central importance in co-partnering with other library and academic units. But, I believe that the architecture of a collections preservation management program can be useful in articulating some of the issues for national and foreign libraries.

Assessment

The most important element in collections preservation is to know and assess your collection. There are a number of assessment strategies available. A condition survey is designed to assess the physical condition of the collection in situ. Condition surveys can range from making observations on damage, deterioration, shelving problems, environmental issues, use patterns, paper and binding condition.

Given the current technology, online catalogs and databases can also be used to provide

critical information in terms of action surveys. Action surveys collect information based on specific actions that are known to be needed, such as binding, brittle books reformatting, and mass deacidification. At the present time, the USMARC format uses the 583 field "Action field" to record assessments, decisions, or actions queued for a given title.

Depending on the sophistication of the online computer, this can be done at the point of acquisitions or later on by generating reports based on searching key elements in the bibliographic record, such as the publication date, the place of publication, title, author, call number, etc., all of which offer ways to refine searches and assess large scale patterns and needs.

An effective needs assessment will reveal the nature and scope of preservation requirements, help establish priorities and develop a reasonable strategy for action based on these priorities and the institution's ability to meet them.

Selection for Preservation

After assessment, selection for preservation strategies must be identified and implemented. The three most common selection strategies practiced today are use-based or the circulation driven approach, subject or discipline specific approach, and new acquisitions approach.

Use-Based/Circulation Based Approach

This approach identifies volumes for preservation at the point of use. Typically, these volumes are identified at circulation, although there are other service points that could serve equally as well, such as, copy centers, the stacks, the reserve book room, interlibrary loan, reading rooms, etc. This strategy addresses that part of the collection which is used most heavily. Not only can selection at circulation identify patterns in wear and tear, early preservation problems, detached boards, as well as brittle material, but it can also identify preservation problems not visible on the shelf, such as missing pages. Of course, selection at circulation does not address collection priorities. For this, the preservation administrator must further refine the use-based approach. Additionally, the preservation administrator will have to assist circulation in establishing methods for batching by types of damage to be selected.

Subject/Great Collections/Class Approach:

There are various names under this "thematic approach" but the selection strategy essentially defines a class of items having the same characteristics. This can be anything from a class within a classification scheme, a format, the highest research priorities, or items that fall within available treatment options. This strategy requires preservation staff to work closely with subject librarians and catalogers to define and refine areas of priorities where the library and/or institution has a preeminent commitment and thus an obligation to preserve. This approach has won great favor among research universities which are often defined by their collection strengths.

This selection approach has also guided the National Endowment for the Humanities microfilming projects and is winning equal favor as a selection approach for digitization projects. Indeed, because it is an approach which is relatively easily justified and extremely efficient and productive, it can be easily translated into general collections preservation activities such as repair, boxing, binding and mass deacidification.

Acquisitions-Based Approach

There are many preservation issues that can be assessed at the time of acquisitions. Once identified these items can either be sent directly to preservation for treatment or the information can be entered into the bibliographic record for future action. This includes

recording for binding, brittle materials which will require reformatting, mass deacidification, or future weeding. This approach requires coordinating both with acquisitions and bibliographers.

Prioritizing

Establishing priorities for collections preservation management must be based on recognizing and articulating the nature of preservation needs, capabilities of the preservation department, institutional objectives, and the resources available. In the United States we are fortunate to have a number of external funding agencies that have enabled and supported large-scale collections preservation activities such as microfilming, digitization, education and training, as well as mass deacidification. The availability of these funds, allows the preservation administrator to use local institutional funds to address other collections preservation treatment options not supported by such agencies, such as binding, repair, and boxing. These are the sorts of resource decisions involved in prioritizing a collections management program.

Implementing a Collections Preservation Program

There are many operational models for organizing a collections preservation program in a library. Collections preservation can be centralized in a preservation department or distributed, as long as objectives are clearly understood, quality control maintained, and effectiveness of the organizational model viable.

Regardless of the organizational model, a framework is needed when attempting a collections preservation program, otherwise large scale needs and actions are disjointed and result in inefficient use of material resources, imprudent expenditure of labor and financial resources, ineffective use of preservation staff, and failure to meet the needs of our patrons and/or the collection. The best managed collections preservation program provides a framework and an implementation plan which targets the collection meaningfully. At the University of Notre Dame, we have organized our various collections preservation activities accordingly.

General Collections Repair Unit

- protective housing/boxing
- environmental monitoring

Library Binding Program Unit

- in-house stiffening
- pamphlets
- contract binding
- mass deacidification

Reformatting/Replacement Program Unit

- microfilming
- photoduplication
- digitization

Preservation Support Activities Unit

- non-invasive security tagging
- stacks cleaning
- care and handling
- staff and user education and awareness

What I have offered here is an overview of how some academic libraries in the United States manage their collections preservation needs.

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